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ABSTRACT

This action research project implemented and evaluated a program to enhance students' prosocial behaviors. The targeted population consisted of students in two second and one third-grade classrooms in a declining urban area of a large midwestern city. The problem of inappropriate behaviors was documented through discipline reports, anecdotal teachers' journals and observations by school personnel. Probable underlying causes included the breakdown of family values due to single-parent homes, high teen pregnancy rates, numerous foster care placements, high student mobility rates, and gang/drug influences. Other possible causes were related to delayed academic skills, large class size, and a lack of school support personnel. Increasing numbers of children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities were other factors contributing to inappropriate behaviors throughout the school setting. A review of solution strategies as suggested by educational literature and other professional sources resulted in the following intervention: implementation of cooperative learning structures, developing activities which provided opportunities for modeling and practicing pro-social skills, and augmenting and supporting existing conflict resolution programs. Post-intervention data indicated that the implemented social skills program made an impressive behavioral difference in the targeted students. Contains 26 references. (Author/SD)

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ADVANCING THE PRO-SOCIAL SKILLS IN AT-RISK ELEMENTARY STUDENTS THROUGH CURRICULAR INTERVENTIONS

Ranae Barnstable
Linda Cargill
Susan Gehlbach
Howard Workman

An Action Research Project

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May, 1997

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ABSTRACT

This project is designed to enhance students' pro-social behaviors. The targeted population consists of two second and one third grade classrooms in a declining urban area of a large Midwestern city. The problem of inappropriate behavior is documented through discipline reports, anecdotal teachers' journals and observations by school personnel.

A probable underlying cause is the breakdown of family values involving single-parent homes, high teen pregnancy rates, numerous foster care placements, high student mobility rates, and gang/drug influences. Other possible causes are related to delayed academic skills, large class size, and a lack of school support personnel. Increasing numbers of children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities are other factors causing inappropriate behaviors throughout the school setting.

A review of solution strategies as suggested by educational literature and other professional sources has resulted in the following intervention: implementation of cooperative learning structures, developing activities which provide opportunities for modeling and practicing pro-social skills, and augmenting and supporting existing conflict resolution programs.

From post-intervention data, Teacher-Researchers conclude that the implemented social skills program made an impressive behavioral difference in the targeted students.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The targeted group of primary students has consistently exhibited inappropriate behavior. Evidence of this includes discipline reports, anecdotal journals by teachers, as well as observations by school personnel.

Introductory Paragraph

This action research project is taking place in three different schools which serve one community. The three schools involved in this project are in old, declining areas of the city where crime and drugs are prevalent, and children have been exposed to a variety of negative influences. Education is not a high priority and appropriate behaviors are not the norm. The students in this research comprise the "at risk" population.

Local Setting

School A

School A was opened in 1932 as a junior high school. The large three-story facility was renovated in 1986 when it became a magnet school through an agreement with the Office of Civil Rights. It is located in a low socio-economic area of a midsize, midwestern city, composed of single-family dwellings, older rental homes, and a public housing project.

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School A has an enrollment of 710 students in grades K-8. Of those students, 39% are White, 56.6% African-American, 2.3% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian. Approximately 56% qualify for free or reduced lunch. The student mobility rate is 26%. Chapter I services are provided for 441 students. Approximately 10% of the student population is in foster care placement.

School A contains 30 regular division and 4 special education cross-categorical classrooms. The faculty consists of 34 teachers, plus 8 full or part-time instructors for the fine arts. These teachers average 15 years experience. Approximately 62% of these teachers have bachelor's degrees, and 38% have earned master's degrees. Of these teachers, 11% are currently or soon will be pursuing an advanced degree. Three Reading Recovery teachers serve 30 students. Students receive assistance from a half-time home/school facilitator and four-fifths time student counselor. Also on staff are a full-time librarian, a speech pathologist, as well as two Chapter I personnel. School A has two administrators since it is both a primary and middle school.

Due to the Fine Arts program, School A is on a nine-period daily schedule, attending one-half hour longer than other schools in the district. Many performing arts groups have traveled throughout the United States for special performances. The school boasts a beautiful 1200-seat auditorium which has been a definite asset for the many performances in its fine arts program.

School A has two separate discipline plans for the primary and middle school. An in-school suspension program has been

developed for dealing with minor offenses. Out-of-school suspensions are warranted for fighting and gross disobedience or repeated offenses. During the 1994-95 school year, well over 100 students were suspended.

Both the administrator and assistant spend a great deal of each day dealing with behavioral concerns and making parental contacts. In addition, approximately 10% of the students require medication at school for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Much time is spent administering medications, since no full-time nurse is available.

Several staff members have previously attended a Peaceable Schools Coalition Workshop and, as a result, have implemented a Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution program. This year, 32 peer mediators have been trained and use the mediation process several times daily.

The theme of Peaceable Schools runs throughout the school year, with several special events promoting peace within our school and community. Many community organizations and businesses provide opportunities for School A. The Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, as well as tutoring programs available through various community centers, are a valuable resource for students-at-risk.

Another concern is getting parents involved and working with the faculty in improving their child's education. Special programs have attempted to encourage parental input, involvement, and responsibility.

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A great number of behavior problems at School A interfere with academic growth. Many students consistently perform poorly on standardized tests, particularly reading and math. Many students do not complete class work and/or homework. They have little motivation to improve. As teachers are spending increasing amounts of time dealing with disruptive behaviors, less time is available for academic instruction.

School B

School B is one of 14 primary schools in its district. The district serves an urban population of approximately 16,500 students, 330 of which attend School B. It is one of the older schools in the district, with the original building (housing second through fourth graders) dating to 1898. School B also has a newer building built in 1963 which houses pre-school, kindergarten, and first grades. The buildings are separated by a closed street. The older building is architecturally significant and is referenced in local pictorial history books.

The student profile of School B is 79% African-American, 13% Caucasian, and 8% Hispanic. Ninety-eight percent of the students are from families with low incomes (meaning family incomes of less than $12,000.00). The school has a 63% mobility rate which is based on the number of students who enroll in or transfer out of the school during the year. The average daily attendance rate is 90%. Thirty-six percent of the students live in public housing. Forty percent of the students spend time in Progress Hall for disciplinary reasons - with 27% of the students suspended at least one time during the current school year. The

two major reasons for suspensions are fighting and repeated disrespect. Approximately one-third of the students have been retained at least one time. School B has consistently fallen into the lowest quartile on state tests. These low scores, retention rates and discipline problems have been attributed to students' delayed reading and math development and poor social skills.

There are 41 full and part-time teaching personnel who have an average of 17 years experience. Thirty-three percent have graduate degrees, and 25% are in the process of obtaining a graduate degree. Two preschool classes and an adult education class are offered. There are three sections in kindergarten, first and second grades, and two sections in third and fourth grades. In addition, students with special needs are served by two Cross Categorical teachers, one teacher of Behavioral Emotional Disorder students, one part-time Learning Disability Resource teacher and a Speech/Language Pathologist. The average class size is 21 students. Part-time staff include physical education, art and music teachers, two reading tutors and a home school facilitator. The home school facilitator acts as a liaison between the school and parents. The principal is completing his fourth year at School B.

Currently, there are a number of reform activities in place to supplement the academic curriculum. These activities are carried on by a number of organizations. The Urban League sponsors quarterly honor roll and perfect attendance receptions and provides transportation to Pizza Hut for "Book-It" students

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in connection with their reading incentive awards. The Children's Home conducts two after school programs which focus on academic and social skills. Project T.A.R.G.E.T. provides attendance monitoring and tutoring. Members of a nearby church have established a "Bear Buddy" program where members adopt each second and third grade student and fulfill a mentoring role.

The school has obtained a Project Success Grant in which the goal is to provide conflict resolution training to students and staff. Students act as peer mediators and resolve conflicts which may occur in the lunchroom, on the playground and in the classroom. Teachers have been trained in a school-wide discipline plan. As part of this program, students are rewarded on a weekly and monthly basis for good behavior. An Urban Education Grant has permitted the implementation of the "Success for All" reading program to improve students' reading skills. "Success for All" was chosen because it has proven to be effective in improving the reading skills of low income minority students.

The neighborhood includes older homes, which have been subdivided into rental units, smaller single family rentals, a public housing project, and some commercial development. Two temporary housing shelters are also a source of students. The students live within walking distance of the school. One bus transports special education students. The neighborhood is in one of the higher crime areas of the city, and most of the students have grown up amidst violent behavior and a repeated poverty cycle.

School C

School C is located in a low-economic neighborhood of older, rental, and single family residences within a large urban area in the midwest. Some of these homes have more than one family living in them.

This is one of the oldest schools in the city. It was constructed in 1914, with additions and/or major improvements made in 1931, 1949, and 1992. The building is currently in good condition. Since all rooms and storage areas are used, the building requires continued, thorough maintenance.

The student population is a total of about 650 students. From that number of students, 76 are students with special needs who are serviced full time in self-contained classes, and 24 students with learning disabilities are serviced through learning resources. Those 24 are either on an inclusion basis or in a pull-out program.

School C is the largest primary school in the city (grades K-4). The average class size is 24 students. Seventy-five percent of the student population is African-American, 23% is Caucasian, and 2% is Hispanic. The gender of the student population is nearly equal. Eighty-three percent of the students in this school qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. Sixty-nine percent come from single-parent households. Nine percent are in foster care. The large percentage of low income students qualifies the entire school as a Title I school. This means that all of the students can receive Title I services.

The mobility rate is 43%, which is lower than the previous

year, but still significantly higher than the district average of 31%. The daily attendance rate at School C is high compared to similar schools within the city. The attendance rate at the targeted schools is 92.4%, while district wide it is 92.1%. Most students attending this school live within a 10 to 12 block radius. A major traffic route divides the attendance area. This means that about 60% of the students are bussed, and, therefore, makes it easier for students to get to school and be on time, which is one reason the truancy rate is half of the district's average rate. The school also has implemented a new attendance procedure aimed at reducing truancy by monitoring, counseling, and referring for legal action if the problem of chronic truancy does not improve.

School C houses 25 self-contained regular division classrooms and 6 self-contained special education classrooms. There is a total staff of 52, which consists of an administrator, an administrative assistant, 2 speech and language therapists, a reading facilitator, 2 full-time certified reading tutors, a support classroom teacher, a full-time home/school facilitator, 6 reading recovery teachers, 2 physical education instructors, a full-time music teacher, a part-time orchestra teacher, 1 teacher for students with learning disabilities, 3 classroom aides for special education classes, a librarian, a parent/teacher library aide, and a computer technology aide. The staff is 87% Caucasian and 13% African-American. Forty-seven percent of the faculty has a master's degree, 16% are currently working toward their master's degree, and all have taken advanced hours. The average

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number of years taught is 14.

A new behavior plan was worked on for more than six months and has very recently been implemented. It includes "caught being good" tickets and writing a student up for breaking the rules, with consequences after three, four, and five write ups. This plan was encouraged and created because of the many behavior problems within the school. Twenty-five percent of the students have been referred to the principal's office for behavior problems. Almost half of that 25% resulted in suspensions. Twenty percent of the students have had at least one retention. More than 80 students have been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and receive medication. Overall state and local test scores for the students at this targeted school are very low. Several things are happening to increase students' basic skills and also to better their test taking skills. A new reading program that is school wide, called "Success For All" was implemented this past year. Six reading recovery teachers are continuing to work with some students. There is an accelerated reader program and all classes receive computer training. A new manipulative, problem-based mathematics program was adopted as was a new science program. A new social studies and language arts program is being considered for the future.

Many of the students at School C come from a home environment that does not equip them to be properly prepared for learning, such as abusive homes, absent parents, unresponsive adults, adults abusing substances, and even criminals. All of

this distracts from the environment at the school. School C tries to provide a safe, effective learning atmosphere where staff and students can work together to create responsible people.

An annual report card is issued for the school district and for its individual schools. The statistics used in this paper to describe the conditions and school populations are taken from the most recent report cards (School Report Card, 1995, p. 1-6).

Surrounding Community

This Midwestern city has approximately 113,000 residents and dates its history to the early French explorers. It is located on a major commercial waterway. The minority population totals over 29,000. The largest employer is a multinational manufacturing firm, and the city is known as a conservative blue collar town. It has a poor reputation for labor relations due to several long and bitter strikes against the largest employer. The city serves as a regional medical center for a significant portion of the state and has three hospitals which have a total of 7500 employees. The city has recently experienced growth in lower paying customer service and telemarketing jobs, with several locally owned firms having a national impact. The city has a 4.9% unemployment rate, which is down substantially from a level of 7.9% within the past three years.

It has several deteriorating, older areas which the city government is trying to revitalize. According to the 1990 Census, on a county-wide basis, 19.5% of families with children live in poverty. There are also a number of wealthy newer areas

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in the north end of town. The city's downtown area has remained vibrant, unlike other older cities of this size. The city has a strong history of participation in civic endeavors by prominent families.

There are many cultural opportunities in the city. A large civic center is located in the downtown area, where the local symphony and opera company perform. Several community theatre groups perform throughout the city. An art museum receives major community support and has attracted several prominent traveling exhibits. A major university is located in the center of the city. A community college is located nearby.

In terms of recreation, the city has one of the largest park districts in the state, with 12,000 acres of parks. There are five public golf courses and an equal number of swimming pools. The park district also operates botanical gardens, indoor ice rinks, and a zoo. Major attractions for visitors are the gambling boat on the river, a natural wildlife preserve, and six major harbors for boating enthusiasts.

The school district is one of the largest in the state and consists of 14 primary schools, 1 magnet school, 1 school for children who are gifted (5th - 8th grades), 12 middle schools, 1 alternative middle school, 4 high schools, 1 alternative high school, 1 adult education center, 8 special schools, and an innovative early childhood center. The school district serves approximately 16,500 students. The district's most recent yearly operating budget was $93,008,880.00. Operating expenditures per pupil are $5,556.00, which is slightly below the state average.

The district has a high school graduation rate of 77.9%, which is slightly above the state average.

There are seven members on the school board. Each member represents a separate geographic area of the region. The district's chief operating officer is the Superintendent, who is supported by three assistant superintendents and one comptroller/treasurer. These administrators oversee 25 major departments within the school district. The district's scores on State Assessment Programs are slightly below the state average in all areas across all grade levels.

There are a number of common issues facing both the school district and the community at large. Teen pregnancy rates in the city are the highest in the country, which force the district to develop innovative programs to continue to educate unwed mothers while accommodating their children. The district has instituted a sex education curriculum for grades 4-12 in an effort to minimize the teen pregnancy problem. Other significant problems facing the district are gangs and drugs. The school district and city police have teamed to teach D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Resistance Education program) to students beginning in third grade. Discipline continues to be a major problem, as does juvenile crime in the city. Juvenile aggravated assault arrests totaled 289 in 1995, a 56% increase over 1994. A discipline task force has been formed consisting of administrators, teachers, and parents to review policies and to attempt to create innovative solutions. The district has developed mission statements to address the foregoing issues and has enlisted parental support to

act on the mission statements. The district continues to network with community officials to minimize these problems.

National Context of Problem

Our schools are encountering growing numbers of children who are lacking adequate social skills. This, along with other factors, results in poor self-control, and children who are more likely to exhibit violent behavior (Hoot & Robertson, 1994). Nationally, the scope of this problem becomes very clear as we look at several surveys that have been conducted in the last few years.

The 1995 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools found that lack of discipline was judged to be the biggest problem facing local public schools. In 1994 the survey found that fighting/violence/gangs tied with discipline as the biggest problems. Eighteen of the previous 26 polls have also cited lack of discipline as the number 1 problem. In polling awareness of national education issues, student violence and dealing with it was by far the issue the public had read or heard the most about. Additionally, 89% of the public believed violence in the nation's schools is increasing, and 67% believed it is increasing in the local schools as well (Elan & Rose, 1995).

The National Association of Secondary Principals reported that three million crimes occur in or near school property each year (Elan & Rose, 1995). This means that 11% of all crimes are occurring in our 85,000 public schools. A 1994 National School Boards Association survey found that school violence is worse now

than it was five years ago according to 75% of 700 school districts surveyed (Sautter, 1995).

> The NSBA survey found that student assaults against other students, students bringing weapons to the classroom, students' attacks on teachers, racial and ethnic violence, and gang-related problems were the top five types of violent incidents reported in schools in 1993. (p. K6)

Elementary and secondary teachers were surveyed on learning environments and safety. These teachers reported that talking in class, cutting class, disrespect, and disruptive behavior interfered with their teaching (Zill & Nolin, 1994).

According to James Bellanca in "Building a Caring, Cooperative Classroom," more students are entering school with a history of poor social models and do not know how to behave in a social organization. Because of this, more teacher time is spent on discipline and academic time suffers (1992).

Sociologists note the effect of changing family structures and suggest one reason why so many children are entering school without basic social skills (Bellanca, 1992).

> The time to support, assist, correct, model positive values, communicate expected behavior, and encourage social skills is often not there, not because the parents are bad, but because they are struggling to earn the dollars to keep the family fed and clothed. (p. 201-202)

As a result of the increasing discipline problems and violence, many programs are already in place in schools focusing on mediation and conflict resolution, mostly in the middle and

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high schools.

Both Bellanca and the American Psychological Association view the early years as the best time to develop a foundation of social skills (Sautter, 1995). According to the APA:

> Early childhood intervention to prevent future violence is critical. Children who show signs of antisocial behavior need to be targeted early for school and family intervention, not only to teach them new ways to resolve social conflicts, but also to ensure that their aggressive tendencies do not interfere with their potential for educational achievement and so contribute to even greater social and learning problems later. (p. K7)

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of inappropriate student interactions, Teacher-Researchers developed a checklist measuring appropriate behaviors in 15 areas (see Appendix A). Data pertaining to 15 targeted social skills were collected on the total student population studied. Students' appropriate behavior was assessed by their former teachers, current teachers, and through self-evaluation.

A point system rated social skills on a 1, 3, and 5 point scale. A score of 1 reflected rarely exhibiting the skill; a score of 3 reflected sometimes exhibiting the skill; and a score of 5 reflected usually exhibiting the skill. A total score was determined for each student by adding scores from all the 15 targeted areas. The minimum score was 15 and the maximum score was 75. A social skills index was created considering scores of

75-55 indicating adequate social skills; scores of 54-36 indicating minimal social skills; scores of 35-15 indicating extremely weak social skills (see Figures 1 and 2).

Teacher-Researchers also compiled data from behavioral checklists in order to evaluate proficiency of specific targeted social skills. This allowed Teacher-Researchers to identify areas of skill strengths and weaknesses and will be used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention plan (see Figures 4 and 4a).

Teacher-Researchers produced a student self-assessment enabling students to reflect on how well they use their social skills (see Appendix B). Student ratings falling within the lower third of the rubric were awarded a point value of 1; ratings falling within the middle third of the rubric were awarded a point value of 3; ratings falling within the upper third of the rubric were awarded a point value of 5. Teacher-Researchers interpreted a score of 1 as evidence of extremely weak social functioning; a score of 3 was evidence of minimal social functioning; a score of 5 was evidence of adequate social functioning as perceived by the student (see Figure 3).

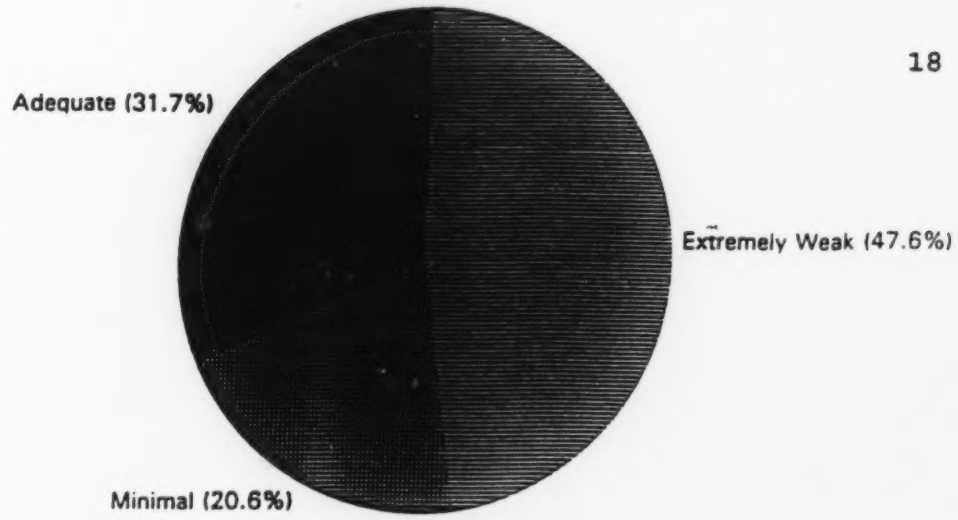

Figure 1: Percent of students exhibiting adequate, minimal, and extremely weak social skills as rated by their previous teacher. September, 1996

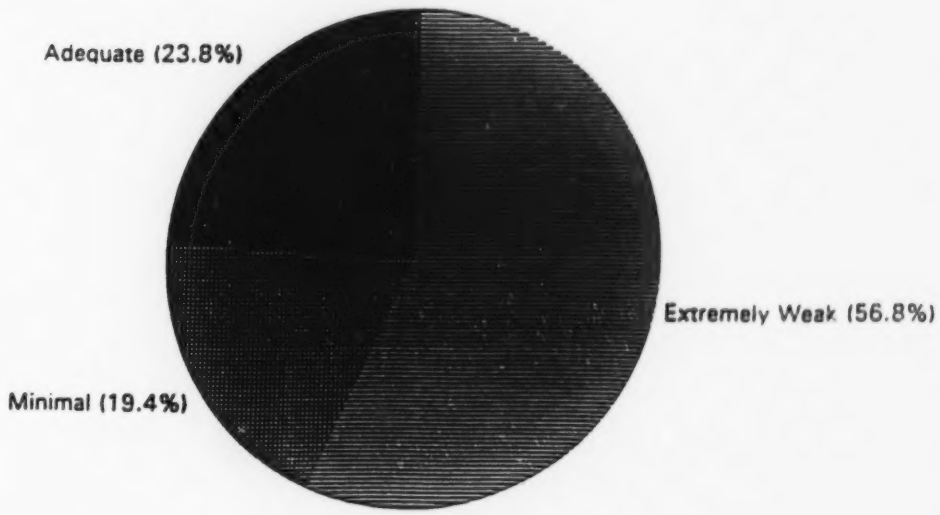

Figure 2: Percent of students exhibiting adequate, minimal, and extremely weak social skills as rated by their current teacher. September, 1996

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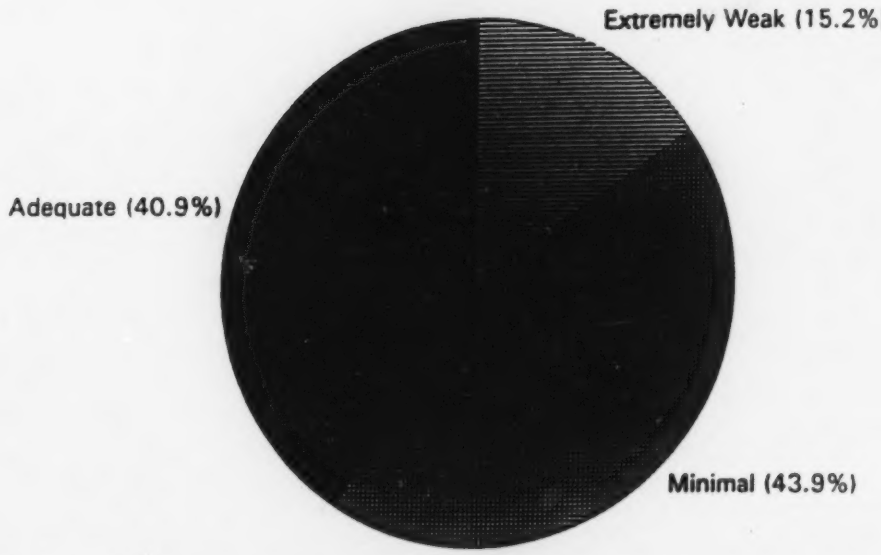

Figure 3: Percent of students exhibiting adequate, minimal, and extremely weak social skills as rated by the students' self evaluation. September, 1996.

Both the former teacher and current Teacher-Researchers concur that a high number of students lack adequate social skills. As evidenced in Figures 1 and 2, over 68% of the 79 students fail to exhibit appropriate behavior as measured by the behavioral checklist. A slight regression was noted when comparing former teacher ratings and current teacher ratings. This possibly reflects that during the three months summer vacation, students lacked structure and experienced inconsistent behavioral expectations. These data suggest the need to implement a behavioral intervention plan.

This need is further suggested by the students' self-assessments. The students' perception of their own pro-social functioning often varied from the teachers' evaluation. Perhaps this signals that the students may not be aware of what constitutes appropriate behavior.

Skill 1. Shows consideration for how others feel.
Skill 2. Accepts responsibility for actions.
Skill 3. Expresses feelings positively/appropriately.
Skill 4. Controls Anger.
Skill 5. Understands and helps others.
Skill 6. Encourages others.
Skill 7. Shares and cooperates.
Skill 8. Listens actively.

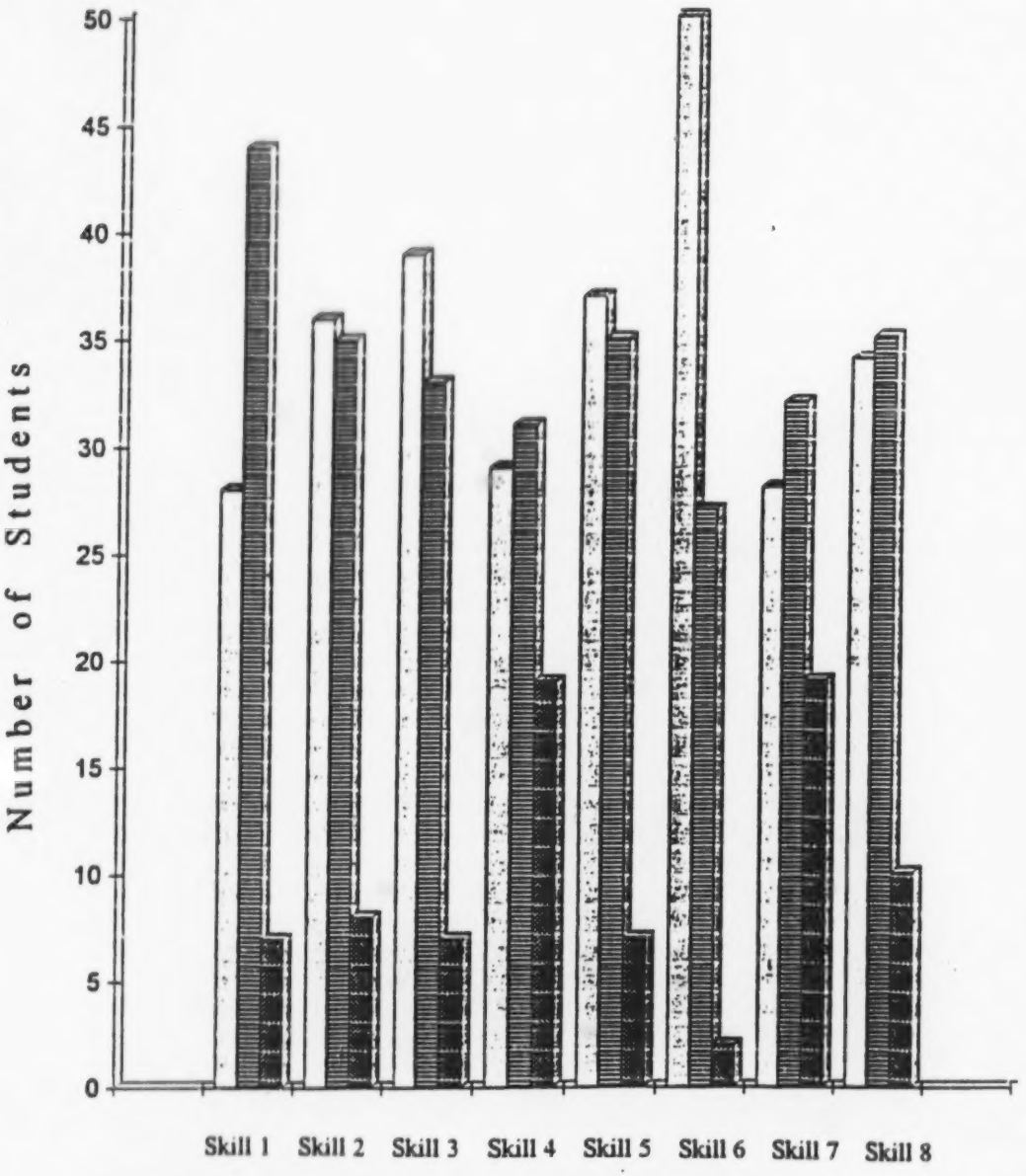

Figure 4: Compilation of student population indicating Teacher-Researchers' rating of the number of students exhibiting individual targeted social skills. (Skills 1-8) September, 1996.

Skill 9. Asks questions skillfully and politely.
Skill 10. Adapts easily to new situations.
Skill 11. Can resolve problems.
Skill 12. Makes decisions thoughtfully.
Skill 13. Works independently and seeks assistance when appropriate.
Skill 14. Contributes to discussion.
Skill 15. Follows classroom procedures.

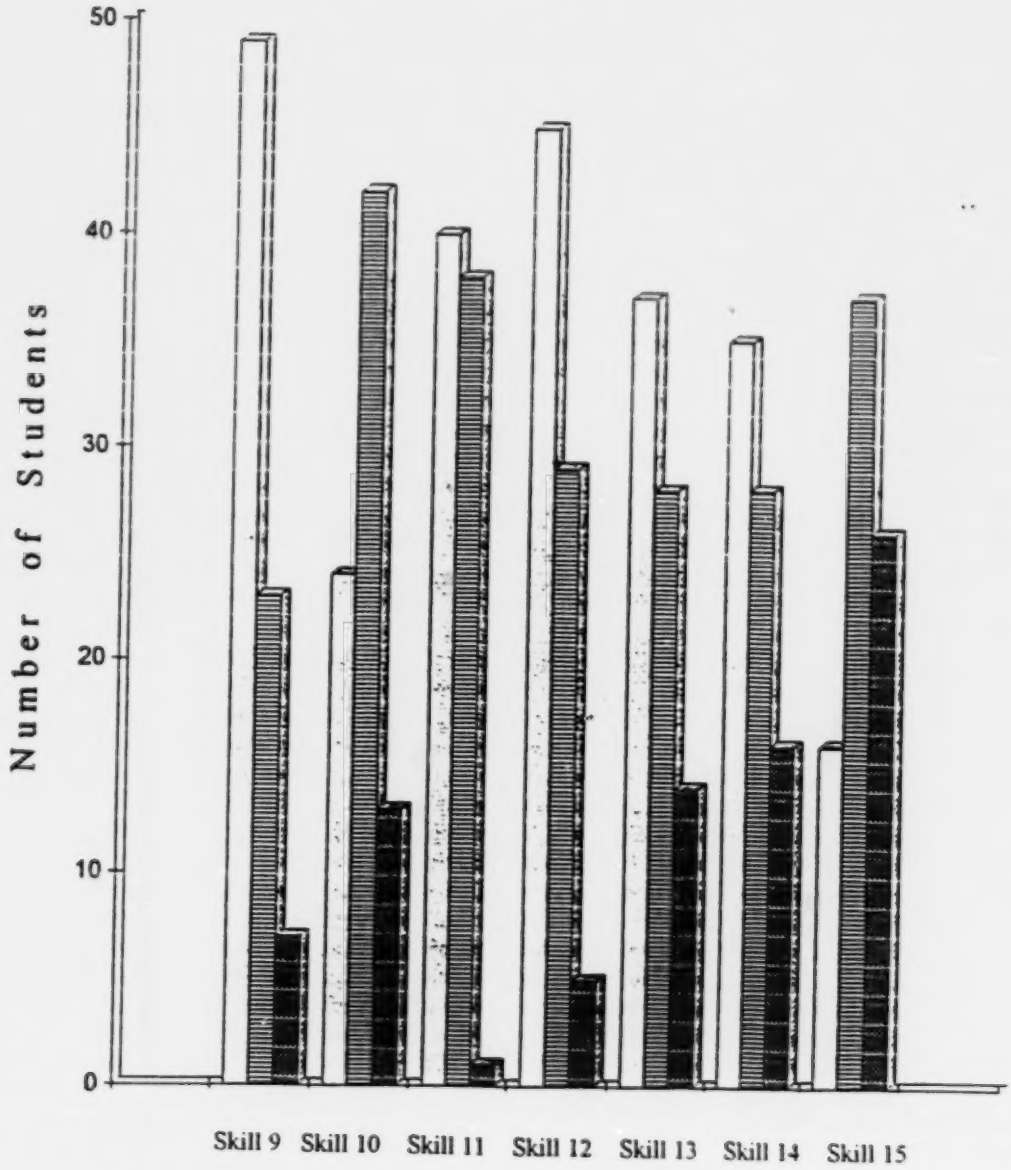

Figure 4a: Compilation of student population indicating Teacher-Researchers' rating of the number of students exhibiting individual targeted social skills. (Skills 9-15) September, 1996.

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The targeted social skills fall within four major categories: classroom behaviors (Skills 8, 9, 13, 14, 15); personal skills (Skills 2, 3, and 4); interpersonal skills (Skills 1, 5, 6, 7, 10); and social reasoning skills (Skills 11, 12). Social reasoning skills appear to be the weakest area of student functioning. Students seem to be most proficient in targeted skills relating to classroom behaviors. This may be attributed to the structured classroom environment and consistent behavioral expectations.

Probable Causes

The high percentage of students who are lacking adequate social skills can be attributed to a variety of causes, the most significant being a breakdown of family values involving single parent homes, high teen pregnancy rates, numerous foster care placements, high student mobility rates, and gang/drug influences. Other probable causes are related to delayed academic skills, large class size, and a lack of school support personnel. Increasing numbers of children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities are other factors causing inappropriate behaviors throughout the school setting.

As indicated in the school report card, the school district is beset with a number of significant issues to be addressed. Among these are the high student mobility rate, low student socioeconomic level and large class size which lead to delayed academic skills and low standard test scores. Many of these issues are not easily solved. The schools in the study encompass

a number of low income neighborhoods where gangs wield much influence and drugs and crime are an everyday occurrence. There is little emphasis on education in the home and little reward for excelling.

Teachers observe the effects of an unstable home life on the students. Many students are in foster care and must deal with the uncertainty of where they will be living next. There is no constant in their lives. Teachers also observe the problems caused by poor nutrition, fatigue, attention deficit disorder, various types of abuse, the high rate of teen pregnancies, and parents who may have been or continue to be alcoholics or drug abusers during and after pregnancy. Schools lack the personnel to deal with all of these problems. Qualified counselors are in short supply.

As cited in the Fort McMurray Social Skills Manual (1993), the following are probable reasons why children do not respond appropriately in social situations:

1. the child may not know what the appropriate behavior is;
2. the child may have the knowledge, but lack the practice; or
3. their emotional responses may inhibit the performance of the desirable behavior (p.1).

The study indicates that parents and teachers must recognize the developmental limitations in children when setting expectations. Health problems, including long-term allergies, poor nutritional diet or even a simple stomach ache, may also affect the child's behavior. Health problems are not always physical in nature. A child's mental health can be affected by traumatic events such as divorce, separation, or birth of a new child (Fort McMurrray, 1993).

The number of children living in poverty is growing, as are many of the problems associated with poverty. Children are often present during violent acts between adults, and are themselves frequent victims of abuse and neglect. Violence is a way of life. It is prevalent on the television and in their neighborhoods. Gunfire has become commonplace in the cities. As a result of this, children have great difficulty learning pro-social skills and understanding why these skills are important (Schickendanz, 1994).

Bellanca (1992) lists three factors which have contributed to the rise in anti-social behavior. He notes that the traditional family is no longer the norm. Students may live with only one of their parents, or sometimes neither parent. Or, where both parents are present, they may both be working and have little time for their children. Second, television no longer shows positive role models. Many TV characters are violent or superficial and uncaring. Given that students watch, on average, four hours of television per day, this change has undoubtedly had

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a profound effect on behavior in the classroom and on the playground. Finally, schools have lost their focus on a central value system because of their desire to eliminate any religious influences in the public schools. The old emphasis on religious values has not been replaced with any new value system. Children learn little about caring for others or social responsibility (Bellanca, 1992).

Lickona (1993) and Nazario (1992) agree that there is a breakdown in family values and a deterioration of civility. In earlier days, the Bible and McGuffey's Readers played a strong role in teaching values such as honesty, hard work, patriotism, courage, and kindness. These texts have been supplanted by values-neutered texts as the public schools have been forced to retreat from their once central role as moral and character educators. Children instead glean values from television or their peers. Television considers certain values acceptable that would have been condemned previously, such as sexual promiscuity and violent behavior. This trend began in the 1960's as a worldwide rise in personalism emphasized self-fulfillment and weakened commitments to the institutions of marriage and parenthood. There developed an almost hostile environment to good moral character as adult role models focused on freedoms over responsibility.

The evidence pointing to a breakdown in family values and a deterioration in civility is overwhelming. Skyrocketing teen pregnancy rates, drug and gang influences, the increasing

prevalence of violent and unethical behavior, and the lack of respect for authority and established standards are all examples of this erosion in values and civility. Now the question is whether this trend can be reversed through the efforts of the school systems since there is no sign of any reversal occurring in the home.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

There has been a significant evolution over the past 200 years as to how and whether values are taught in the public schools. Prior to the early 1800's, the primary source of moral and religious instruction was the Bible. However, when debate arose over whose Bible to use and which religious doctrines should be taught, a new sourcebook on moral principles was developed by William McGuffey. In 1836, McGuffey began offering his McGuffey Readers. These books incorporated into arithmetic and reading lessons the benefits of honesty, hard work, thriftiness, civic duties and courage (Lickona, 1993).

Character education began to decline in the 20th century. This decline can be attributed to a number of factors, one of which was the rise of the "me" generation in the 1960's which emphasized individual rights and freedoms over responsibility. People turned inward toward self-fulfillment and began to ignore moral norms such as marriage and parenthood. In addition, moral norms became more difficult to establish in an increasingly pluralistic and secular society. The end result was that public schools retreated from their role as moral and character

educators (Lickona, 1993).

Educators have now begun to realize the need to reestablish some form of character education in the classroom. One reason for this reversal is that many children are no longer receiving a proper foundation in morals at home. Many unfortunately grow up in an atmosphere where immorality can easily become the norm (Townsend, 1992).

In searching for solutions to reestablish moral and character education, many authors were found who encouraged the active teaching of social skills at an early age. In 1988, Kain, Downs, and Black viewed social skills as an integral part of a person's future success. "Schools must teach these skills, the authors contend, because they are life tools that will benefit the student and society." (p. 107) Stone (1993) believes we need to redesign our classrooms in order to teach social skills, helping children to develop an understanding of what to do, and how they are to do it.

Further evidence to encourage the active teaching of social skills includes McGinnis' and Goldstein's (as cited in Fort McMurray, 1993) reasons why children have difficulties in social situations. These reasons include a lack of knowledge of correct behavior and little practice in using correct behavior. Educators have a responsibility to teach children appropriate responses and behaviors ranging from dealing with anger and aggression to making friends and seeking attention appropriately (Fort McMurray, 1993).

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Warger and Rutherford (1993) addressed the importance of developing social skills in students with disabilities. Their approach involved co-teaching between a special educator and general education teacher. They believe social skills training is necessary for some students to benefit from academic instruction. Other benefits include improving mainstreaming efforts and acceptance of the disabled child in the classroom. Benefits continue as students later seek employment and possibly live independently. Patricia Wells, (1991), as Director of Educational Development for Boys Town, believes that a lack of effective social behaviors is a major factor in poor academic achievement. These same effective social behaviors are also necessary to be successful in employment. Research has shown that job-related skills of disabled youth can be improved by social skills training.

Research indicates interactions between disabled and non-disabled students increase with social skills training. Peer acceptance of disabled students is also enhanced (Anderson, Nelson, Fox, & Gruber, 1988). The necessity of this training is underscored by Jones (1994) in describing the lack of social skills in some children with attention deficit disorder. Their difficulty in maintaining concentration, poor memory, and impulse control interfere with their interpersonal relationships.

In a Kappan Special Report on Youth Violence (Sautter, 1995) the American Psychological Association stresses the importance of teaching social skills as early as possible if we intend to

reduce violence. They continue to recommend using programs that address the various social contexts including peer groups,school, family and community. According to Sautter, the state of Illinois mandates conflict resolution, which is already taking place in more than 2000 schools across the nation. Teachers, in general, feel that conflict resolution and peer mediation have been helpful in getting students to think about consequences of their actions, including respect towards their peers and being aware of alternative behaviors to choose.

Johnson and Johnson (1989-1990) believe small group and interpersonal skills "should be taught as systematically as mathematics, social studies, or any subject" (p. 32). Students need to be made aware of the need for the skills, teachers should model them, and finally students need to continually practice them until they are internalized. To achieve these outcomes, Johnson and Johnson encourage cooperative learning techniques. Benefits realized include greater achievement and retention as well as improved critical thinking skills.

James Bellanca (Costa, Bellanca, Fogerty, 1992) suggests a foundation of social skills in the primary grades is essential to success in later years. Bellanca, also a proponent of cooperative learning, cited a program called "Project Extend", a three year program conducted in northern Illinois. Cooperative learning methods and parental involvement proved very successful with at-risk K-3 students, both academically and socially. Bellanca reasons that if teachers spend more time early in the

school year on teaching cooperative social skills, they will reap the benefits later when more time can be spent on academic work with fewer behavioral interruptions.

The literature offers suggestions on effective classroom environments and structuring a cooperative classroom. Jones (1994) describes the teacher as an "Environmental Engineer" encouraging learning and expression of ideas as well as involvement in social experiences. Jones further describes a master teacher as focusing on the child's strengths and abilities. Fred H. Jones (Jones, 1994) sees effective teaching as having strong body carriage. Use of hand signals can also be a powerful tool in working with inattentive students. Using direct, encouraging praise for specific behaviors and efforts will also encourage good social responses. Finally, Jones views the teacher as a powerful model of social behavior. This involves smiles and gestures, handshakes, greetings at the door, reinforcement of good behaviors and interesting and forceful verbal cues.

Abruscato (1994) suggests displaying a poster listing each social skill that will be addressed. Discussing the skills and why they are important, where they might be used, and relating those social skills to rules created for the classroom would be beneficial.

Cooperative learning techniques were discussed by several authors. Johnson and Johnson (1989-1990) stress five conditions that must be in place for successful cooperative learning. These

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include "positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and group processing." (p. 30) Bellanca (Costa, et al., 1992) describes Johnson's model used in teaching social skills. The first step is the hook. This is to spark the student's interest and introduce what the social skill looks and sounds like. Next, the lesson allows the children to look back on the previous activity and develop their own ideas of what the skill would look and sound like, perhaps with a T-chart. Practice of the skill follows at least once a day for several minutes until the students have become comfortable with it. After that, using the skill is built into daily content areas. At least once a week, time should be taken to allow the children to reflect on what they have learned, and how they feel they have progressed. Time should be spent to allow feedback on their progress, recognizing and celebrating successes. Johnson and Johnson (1989-1990) believe students are motivated to learn more by rewarding them with bonus points for using the target skills. Bonus points may be awarded for using the skills and then accumulated for various awards, individual or classroom. Charts or graphs can be posted to document progress. Finally, to encourage transfer of that learned skill, recognition must be given outside the classroom by faculty, parents, and other students. Efforts to use the skill at home, as well as on the playground and in the hallways at school should not go unnoticed.

Anderson (Anderson et al., 1988) also supports cooperative

learning methods as opposed to individualistic and competitive structures. The authors feel schools use competition too much, serving to interfere in building relationships. Individualizing does not allow time to practice social skills.

Goldstein's structured learning (as cited in Anderson, et al., 1988) is described as another method for teaching social skills. Also intended to be used for group work, it consists of four elements: "modeling, role playing, performance feedback, and transfer of training." (p. 5) These authors believe the best way to teach social skills is by combining both cooperative learning methods and structured learning.

Another solution component addressed in the literature recognizes that schools need to assist parents in raising ethical and law-abiding children. The key word is "assist". The teachers cannot be expected to assume the primary function of the parent in teaching morals to children. They can, however, encourage parental involvement in character education and convey to the parent the need to reinforce at home the pro-social skills taught in the classroom (Armstrong & McPherson, 1991).

When parents get involved in school activities, it conveys to the child that the parent considers school to be important. It is also an indication that the parent is providing support and encouragement for the learning process at home (Zill & Nolin, 1994). As parents become actively involved in the character education program, they can learn to act as positive role models.

Ideally, parental involvement will result in increased communication between the home and school and insure that the values learned and expected behaviors are consistent (Fort McMurray, 1993).

Researchers have developed several social skills curricula. The Fort McMurray social skills curriculum concludes that teachers have many opportunities in the classroom to demonstrate appropriate behavior and to provide positive feedback to those students who follow such behavior. Teachers must be very clear in teaching pro-social behavior because students may not have been exposed to this type of behavior in their culture, or, if exposed, may have had little opportunity to practice it. One of the key goals of this curriculum is that students must be able to transfer their pro-social classroom skills to situations outside the classroom. Role playing is extremely important to allow the students to practice these skills, but role playing alone is not enough. The student must also understand why this new behavior is necessary. The four categories of the Social Skills Diagnostic Screen developed by the Fort McMurray School System include: personal factors, interpersonal factors, social reasoning skills, and classroom behaviors. This assessment recognizes many factors causing behavioral problems which may be environmentally induced (Fort McMurray, 1993).

Another social skills curriculum is the Boys Town Model. This model focuses on identifying desirable pro-social behaviors and effectively instructing students with respect to the

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behaviors. Consistency and predictability are promoted, and there are clear consequences for misbehavior and rewards for positive actions (Wells, 1991).

Rutherford's Teaching Social Skills Program is based on three key assumptions: (a) all students are capable of learning social skills if they are properly taught; (b) social skills instruction is effective when tailored to meet the individual needs of the students; and (c) social skills instruction must focus on the generalization of learned social behaviors across settings, time, and behaviors. This curriculum can be used as an assessment tool as well as a remediation tool. It is structured to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the problem behavior as well as assessing the student's behavior at a level sufficient to remediate the problem (Warger & Rutherford, 1993).

Both Kreidler (1995) and Jones (1994) suggest using literature as a vehicle for teaching social skills. They list appropriate children's books which may be used to enhance a social skills curriculum. Bibliotherapy relates stories to actual life experiences that students may encounter. In addition, Jones presents various social skills training programs that are available commercially.

Begun (1995) provides a curriculum based on real life situations. Major lesson objectives include "to build students' self-esteem, self-control, respect for the rights of others, and a sense of responsibility for one's own actions" (p. iii). Teaching conflict resolution skills is another focus of this

curriculum.

Shaw (1992) in the book Community Building in the Classroom offers a structured approach to cooperative learning including classroom building, team building, and relationship skills building. This book utilizes a variety of activities developed by cooperative learning experts such as Roger and David Johnson as well as Spencer Kagan. Numerous lessons are presented which foster positive peer interactions.

Carter and Sugai (1989) believe that the same strategies that are used to teach academic skills should be used to teach social skills, i.e., instruction, practice and feedback. Social skills training should be performed in small groups of three to six students. This allows students to practice the skills with persons they are likely to interact with outside the classroom. In addition, peers are felt to be better models than an adult, and peer feedback can be more meaningful and reinforcing than teacher feedback.

Carter and Sugai conclude that no single curriculum component is optimal and that multi-component packages are more likely to be successful. In any case, the curriculum must be individualized to meet the needs of the student and the teacher's ability of assess such needs is crucial to the success of the student's performance.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of increased instructional strategies focusing on personal factors, interpersonal factors, social reasoning skills, and classroom behaviors during the period of September, 1996, through January, 1997, the targeted students will improve their behavior, as measured by behavior checklists, teachers' journals, and students' self-assessments.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Implement cooperative learning structures.
2. Develop activities which provide opportunities for modeling and practicing pro-social skills.
3. Augment and support an existing conflict resolution program.

Project Action Plan

The following action plan is designed to facilitate teaching four major categories of pro-social skills. The categories include: personal, interpersonal, social reasoning, and classroom behaviors. The strategies involve cooperative learning, conflict resolution, and modeling/practicing. It is our intention that these strategies will decrease inappropriate behavior in the targeted second and third grade classes.

This program will be in effect for approximately 21 weeks beginning in September, 1996, and continuing through January, 1997. The instruction will occur three times per week.

The action plan and time line follow:

Week I Gather Baseline Data (checklist)

Create Classroom Environment

Week II	Introduce Classroom Behavior
Week III	Introduce Active Listening Skills
Week IV	Completing a Task
Week V	Working Independently and Seeking Attention Appropriately
Week VI	Contributing to Discussion
Week VII	Controlling Anger
Week VIII	Expressing Feeling in a Positive Manner
Week IX	Showing Consideration for How Others Feel
Week X	Accepting Responsibility for Our Actions
Week XI	Accepting Constructive Criticism
Week XII	Adapting to New Situations
Week XIII	Understanding and Helping Others
Week XIV	Encouraging Others
Week XV	Sharing and Cooperating with Peers
Week XVI	Asking Questions Skillfully
Week XVII	Choosing the Best Alternative
Week XVIII	Resolving Problems
Week XIX	Making Decisions Thoughtfully
Week XX	Accepting Not Getting His/Her Own Way
Week XXI	Practicing Social Skills in a Social Situation

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of this intervention, teachers will compile appropriate behavior checklists and review all discipline reports every four weeks. Additionally, teachers

will develop a scoring rubric to evaluate students' self-assessments. Information from teachers' journals will be reviewed in the final analysis of this intervention. Finally, Teacher-Researchers will compile and analyze data including baseline information and ongoing assessments.

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CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve the behavior of at-risk students in the school setting. Cooperative learning structures and conflict resolution methods within a social skills curriculum were selected to effect the desired changes. A 21 week social skills curriculum was developed focusing on personal and interpersonal factors, social reasoning skills, and classroom behaviors. These four areas each have within them several specific social skills.

The personal skills were taught to enhance the student's self-esteem. They also help the child develop confidence and work independently. Instruction in this area included: consideration for others, accepting responsibility, expressing feelings appropriately, and controlling anger. These skills promote self-awareness and confidence.

Skills relevant to interpersonal factors were taught to enable students to relate and interact with others. The interpersonal skills taught that pertained to direct interaction with other students were as follows: understanding, helping, encouraging, sharing, and cooperating. The lessons presented

addressing a student's emotional competence in relating to others were: active listening, asking questions skillfully, and adapting to new situations. Many of the skills in this area focus on the students' ability to share feelings and opinions. They also focus on strengthening the students' confidence. When assessing these skills, it was important for the Teacher-Researchers to observe the student in relationship to other students in the classroom.

The social reasoning skills were chosen to enhance students' problem-solving ability. The process of thoughtful decision-making was modeled and practiced in numerous lessons. Ideally, mastery of these skills would transfer beyond the classroom to socially unstructured situations.

The last category addresses classroom behaviors. These skills encouraged the student to become an independent worker who only seeks assistance when necessary. Cooperative learning techniques included valuing everyone's opinions and encouraging participation. These skills created a risk-free environment in which everyone can easily contribute to discussions. In addition, the ability to follow directions and procedures is essential to a student's success. Role-playing demonstrated the necessity of having rules. The importance of being responsible both at home and at school was a recurring theme throughout the intervention.

Direct instruction of this curriculum occurred twice weekly with the third day used as a review of the previous two. This

instruction involved incorporating modeling, practicing, reflecting and a cumulative review of skills. Social skills were taught in a variety of ways using a combination of class, team, partner, and individual activities. Each week, we focused on one particular skill, taught two lessons, and then reviewed and reflected on that week. Social skills lessons were initiated the second week of school and continued for 21 weeks.

The two lessons taught each week consisted of five elements. The first element was the purpose or objective. This was always shared with the students so they knew the goal. The next element was the input or the information about the social skill being taught. Teacher-Researchers knew the benefit of explaining in detail what was going to be taught and, therefore, incorporated it into every lesson. Students were also allowed to include what they knew about that particular social skill in this part of the lesson.

The focus activity, commonly called "the hook," was the third part of each lesson plan for this research project. This has also been called the anticipatory set and is used to get the students thinking about the main idea of the lesson. This is usually something that takes a very short length of time and yet can be one of the most memorable parts of the lesson. "The hook" grabbed the students' attention right away.

The lesson plans then went on to the instructional activity which could be described as the "heart" of each lesson. This is where application of the skill was modeled and practiced by the

students. It also included direct instruction and working together as aspects of the lessons. Teams and/or partner activities were usually a part of this element in the lesson plans. Every lesson had a different activity, but many used the same components of cooperative learning that were previously mentioned.

Finally, each lesson ended with some type of structured closure. The Teacher-Researchers included this element to foster better retention of the material taught and to help process what had just been experienced. The closure portion of each lesson was accomplished by using the following types of strategies: metacognitive discussion, stem statements, journal writing, partner sharing, writing or verbalizing PMI's (Positive, Minus, and Interesting aspects), reviewing the lesson, or just quiet reflection time.

Teacher-Researchers kept weekly journals evaluating and reflecting on lessons taught, but not as a measurement tool of student behavior. Checklists were completed monthly for individual students assessing 15 targeted social skills. Originally, a student self-assessment was to be used as one of the data sources. However, midway through the intervention, the students' self-assessment rubrics were determined to be invalid.

Initially, the Teacher-Researchers intended to measure improvement in student behavior through the use of discipline reports. Inconsistencies in the behavioral expectations and recordkeeping outside the targeted classrooms resulted in

elimination of these reports as a measurement of assessment.

When research started in September of 1996, seventy-nine students began in three different classrooms from three different schools. A total of 55 students was stable throughout this research. Several reasons were noted. Some students were placed in special education rooms, some qualified for gifted programs, and others were moved because of overcrowding. Probably the most common reason was students transferred to another school. New students entering the research classrooms after the project began were included in the activities, but not in the assessment data, final analysis, or recommendations.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effect of the pro-social skills curricular intervention, Teacher-Researchers compiled data from the initial behavioral checklist. Due to changes in the number of students remaining in the pro-social skills research, the initial data reported in figures 4 and 4a in Chapter 2 has changed and is shown in Appendices C and D. These Appendices represent data results from Teacher-Researchers' behavioral checklists in September of 1996. Appendices E and F represent data results from Teacher-Researchers' behavioral checklists in February of 1997. The number of students exhibiting each targeted skill is represented by proficiency ratings of rarely, sometimes, and usually.

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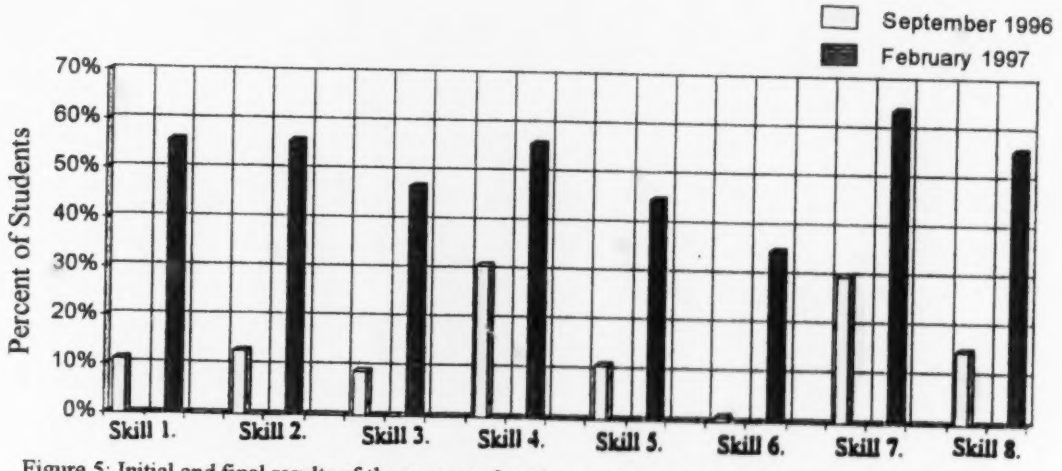

Figure 5: Initial and final results of the percent of students rating usually on the behavior checklists evaluation tool by the Teacher-Researchers. (skills 1-8)

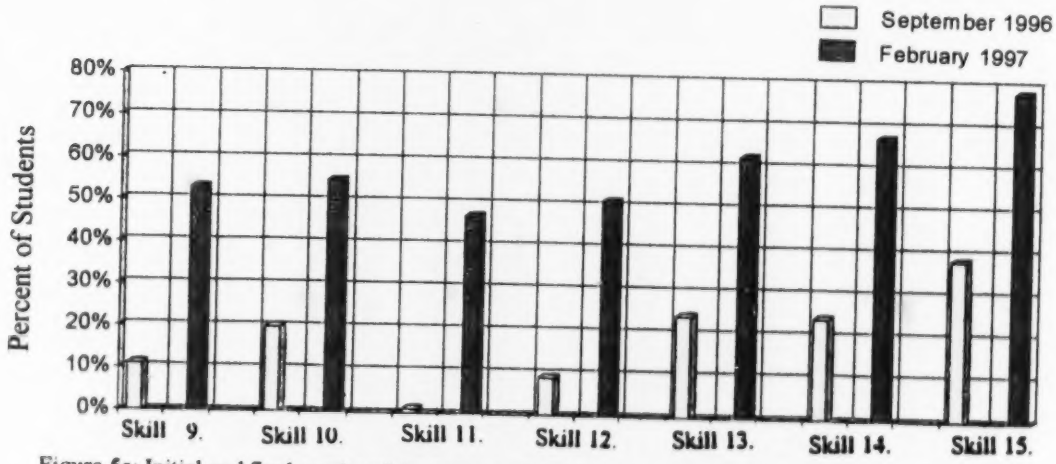

Figure 5a: Initial and final results of the percent of students rating usually on the behavior checklists evaluation tool by the Teacher-Researchers. (skills 9-15)

Data was analyzed in order to evaluate and compare proficiency ratings from initial evaluation in September, 1996, to final evaluation in February, 1997. Teacher-Researchers determined the proficiency rating of "usually" to be the most accurate measure of positive gains. Therefore, the following

tables contain a comparison of the number of students rated "usually" in September of 1996 to February of 1997, as well as the percentage of increase for each skill. Each table represents one of the four categories of interpersonal, personal, social reasoning, and classroom behavior skills.

Table 1 represents gains made in interpersonal skills as shown by the proficiency rating of "usually." The most substantial increase was seen in skill 1 - Showing Consideration (45%). This skill was an integral part of cooperative learning. Instruction in this skill included a lesson on giving compliments and was a favorite activity, judged by the students' continuing interest in practicing this skill. Adapts Easily showed a 35% increase (skill 10).

Table 1

Percent of Students Exhibiting Proficiency Rating of Usually for Interpersonal Skills

Skill	September '96	February '97	Change
1. Shows Consideration..	11%	56%	45%
5. Understands/Helps..	11%	45%	34%
6. Encourages..	1%	35%	34%
7. Shares..	30%	64%	34%
10. Adapts Easily..	20%	55%	35%

Table 2 represents gains made in personal skills as shown by the proficiency rating of "usually." Both accepting responsibility (skill 2) and expressing feelings (skill 3) shared

an increase of over 35%. Role-playing of real situations allowed the student to connect these skills to real life circumstances. This practice was beneficial as evidenced by increased follow-through on homework assignments, as well as an increase in non-threatening language. One aggressive student changed his method of pushing his way into the line to asking, "May I have my spot in line, please?"

Table 2

Percent of Students Exhibiting Proficiency Rating of Usually for Personal Skills

Skill	September '96	February '97	Change
2. Accepts Responsibility	13%	56%	43%
3. Expresses Feelings	9%	47%	38%
4. Controls Anger	31%	56%	25%

Table 3 represents gains made in social reasoning skills as shown by the proficiency rating of "usually." A substantial increase of 46% was seen in resolving problems (skill 11). Role-playing of an actual situation that had occurred in one classroom involving a stolen lunch encouraged students to brainstorm creative and alternative solutions. Students who were previously very quick to accuse others of wrongdoing were encouraged in this activity to investigate all possibilities in resolving and preventing future problems. The human graph activity was very helpful in enabling students to make thoughtful decision independently. In all three classrooms, Teacher-Researchers

noted the transition from initially "staying with the group" to be willing to find their own place on the graph and stand alone.

Table 3

Percent of Students Exhibiting Proficiency Rating of Usually for Social Reasoning Skills

Skill	September '96	February '97	Change
11. Resolving Problems..	1%	47%	46%
12. Making Decisions..	9%	51%	42%

Table 4 represents gains made in classroom behaviors as shown by the proficiency rating of "usually." Contributes to discussion showed the largest margin of improvement in this category. This was evidenced by the noticeable, repeated, and continued variety of students sharing ideas and answers with their classmates. Asking questions skillfully (skill 9) showed a gain of 42%. This skill was easily evidenced by Teacher-Researcher's observations of students' verbal interactions involving appropriate ways of asking permission, asking for specific items, asking directions, or asking for assistance. Listening actively (skill 8) also showed a large gain. Listening activities made the students aware that listening was a skill with different features, such as eye contact and alert postures.

Table 4

Percent of Students Exhibiting Proficiency Rating of Usually for Classroom Behavior Skills

Skill	September '96	February '97	Change
8. Listens Actively..	15%	56%	41%
9. Asks Questions..	11%	53%	42%
13. Works Independently..	24%	62%	38%
14. Contributes to Discuss.	24%	67%	43%
15. Follows Procedures..	38%	78%	40%

In September of 1996, more than half of the students involved with the research exhibited extremely weak social skills. Those data are illustrated on page 17 in Chapter 2. How the rankings of extremely weak, minimal, and adequate were arrived at are explained in Chapter 2, page 17. As shown in Figure 6, by February of 1997, only 12.7% of students were exhibiting extremely weak social skills. This is a decrease of 41.8%. The percentage of students exhibiting minimal social skills use stayed very close throughout the research; from 21.8% in September of 1996 to 18.2% in February of 1997. The most notable difference was in the percentage of students who practiced adequate use of social skills. This increase went from 23.6% in September of 1996 to 69% in February of 1997. Overall, the extremely weak use of social skills decreased by 41.8%, and the adequate use of social skills increased by 45.4%.

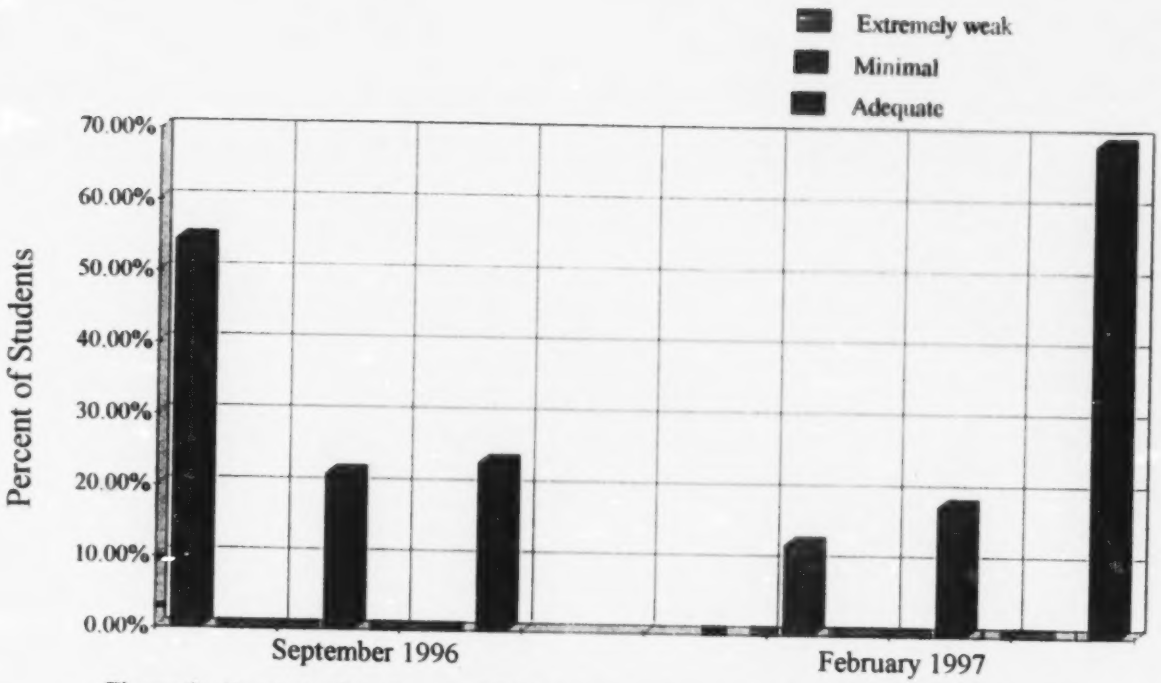

Figure 6: Percent of students exhibiting extremely weak, minimal, and adequate social skills as rated by Teacher-Researchers'. Graph represents only student population participating for the duration of the research.

Conclusions and Recommendations

By analyzing the data, Teacher-Researchers can see that the social skills program prepared and disseminated to the targeted students, made an impressive difference in behavior. In all three research classrooms, pro-social skills instruction improved behavior noticeably. The use of interpersonal and personal skills became more proficient as students were exposed to various aspects of each pro-social behavior. By modeling and practicing

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these skills, students began to internalize and exhibit appropriate behavior in a variety of situations.

Greater competency in the area of social reasoning became apparent as students learned the processes of conflict resolution and thoughtful decision-making. Role-playing real life experiences enabled students to develop alternative and creative solutions to problems. It was noticed outside of the classroom by an assistant principal that targeted students were actively trying to solve problems and conflicts through more acceptable techniques.

The most remarkable improvements were noticed in the areas of classroom behaviors. With the increased use of cooperative learning structures, students became quite skillful in listening actively, asking questions, contributing to discussion, and following procedures. Teacher-Researchers enjoyed increased time spent with academic instruction and decreased time resolving discipline problems.

When social skills are not being taught at home, the school has become the logical place to impart upon students the importance of pro-social skills. The classroom setting provided many opportunities to teach students how to act appropriately in group situations. The school setting had an unexpected advantage that might not be available in the home setting - peer pressure. After a period of time, students enthusiastically embraced the social skills curriculum by encouraging other students to use their pro-social skills, as evidenced by one student saying, "Use

your social skills, Bitch!" during a verbal confrontation involving two other students.

In order to better facilitate this pro-social skills curriculum, it is recommended that the facilitator not use the student self-assessment if they are working in an elementary setting. Young children have not developed the maturity to understand the abstract concept of self-assessing.

A crucial problem encountered was attempting to add this instruction to an already crowded curriculum. Various modifications may be considered when adapting this program to individual classrooms. Two activities may be taught weekly instead of three or more, and more modeling/practicing of the skills with less direct instruction would be advised.

Initial assessment of students' behavior may be more accurate if the behavioral checklists are completed after the fourth week of school. This would allow the teacher to become better acquainted with the students, recognizing when the "honeymoon" period of good behavior gives way to a normal pattern of behavior.

The introduction of the cooperative learning structures earlier in the program to enhance classroom environment as well as encourage teamwork is recommended. These cooperative learning skills are utilized throughout the social skills curriculum and in other content areas. Transferring these cooperative learning standards to everyday life situations is the intent of this action plan.

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To enhance this transfer, a more fully developed parental involvement component is suggested. Once the parents are involved in the program and support consistent expectations, they will become active in modeling and assisting their child towards successfully applying these skills.

The Teacher-Researchers endorse this social skills curriculum and will continue to develop and improve this program.

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APPENDICES

Appropriate Behavior Checklist

TARGETED SOCIAL SKILLS	Student							
1. Shows consideration for how others feel.								
2. Accepts responsibility for actions.								
3. Expresses feelings positively/appropriately.								
4. Controls anger.								
5. Understands and helps others.								
6. Encourages others.								
7. Shares and cooperates.								
8. Listens actively								
9. Asks questions skillfully and politely.								
10. Adapts easily to new situations.								
11. Can resolve problems.								
12. Makes decisions thoughtfully.								
13. Works independently and seeks assistance when appropriate.								
14. Contributes to discussion.								
15. Follows classroom procedures.								

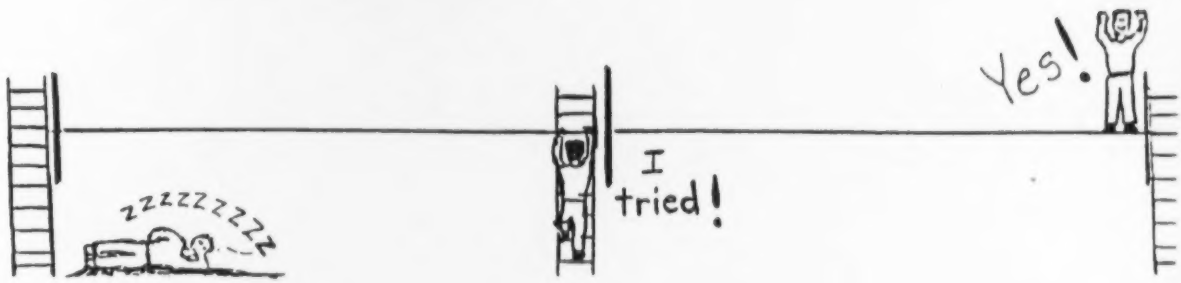
Please use the following rating scale to assess the behavior skills for each student:
1 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 5 = Usually

Appendix B
Student's Self-Assessment

Name _____

Date _____

How well did I use my social skills today?



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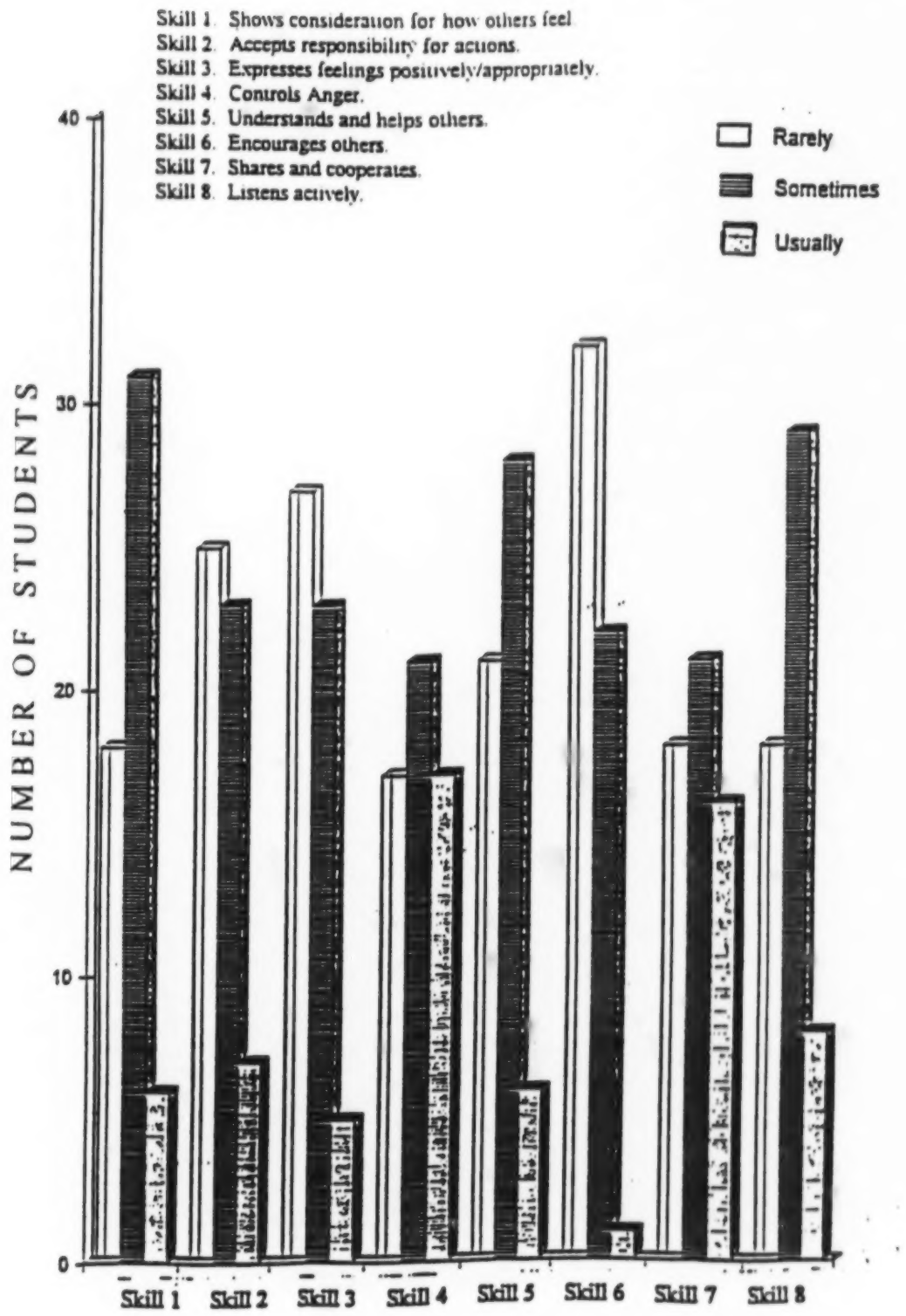
Appendix C
Pre-Assessment of Social Skills 1-8, September 1996



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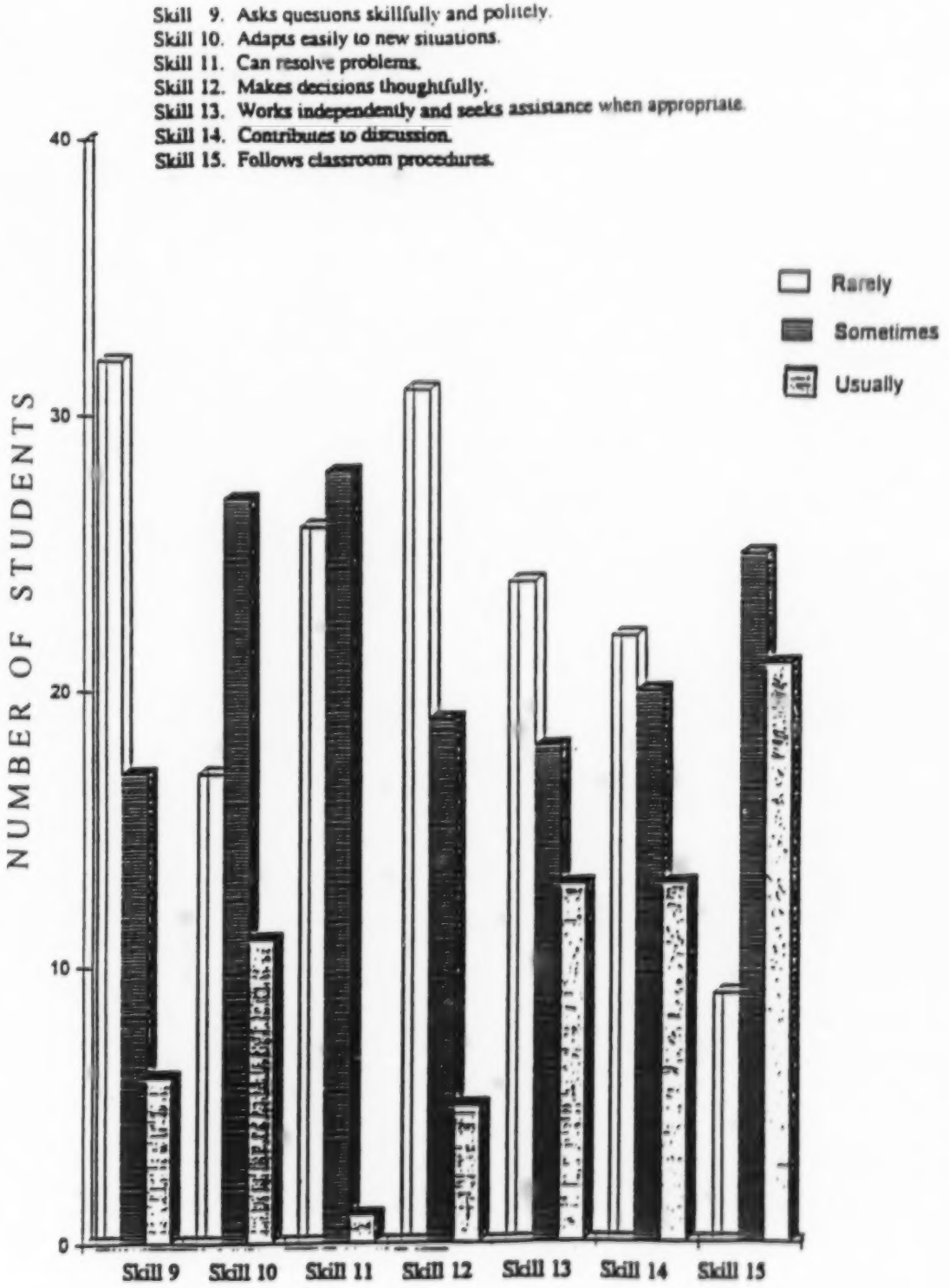
Appendix D
Pre-Assessment of Social Skills 9-15, September 1996



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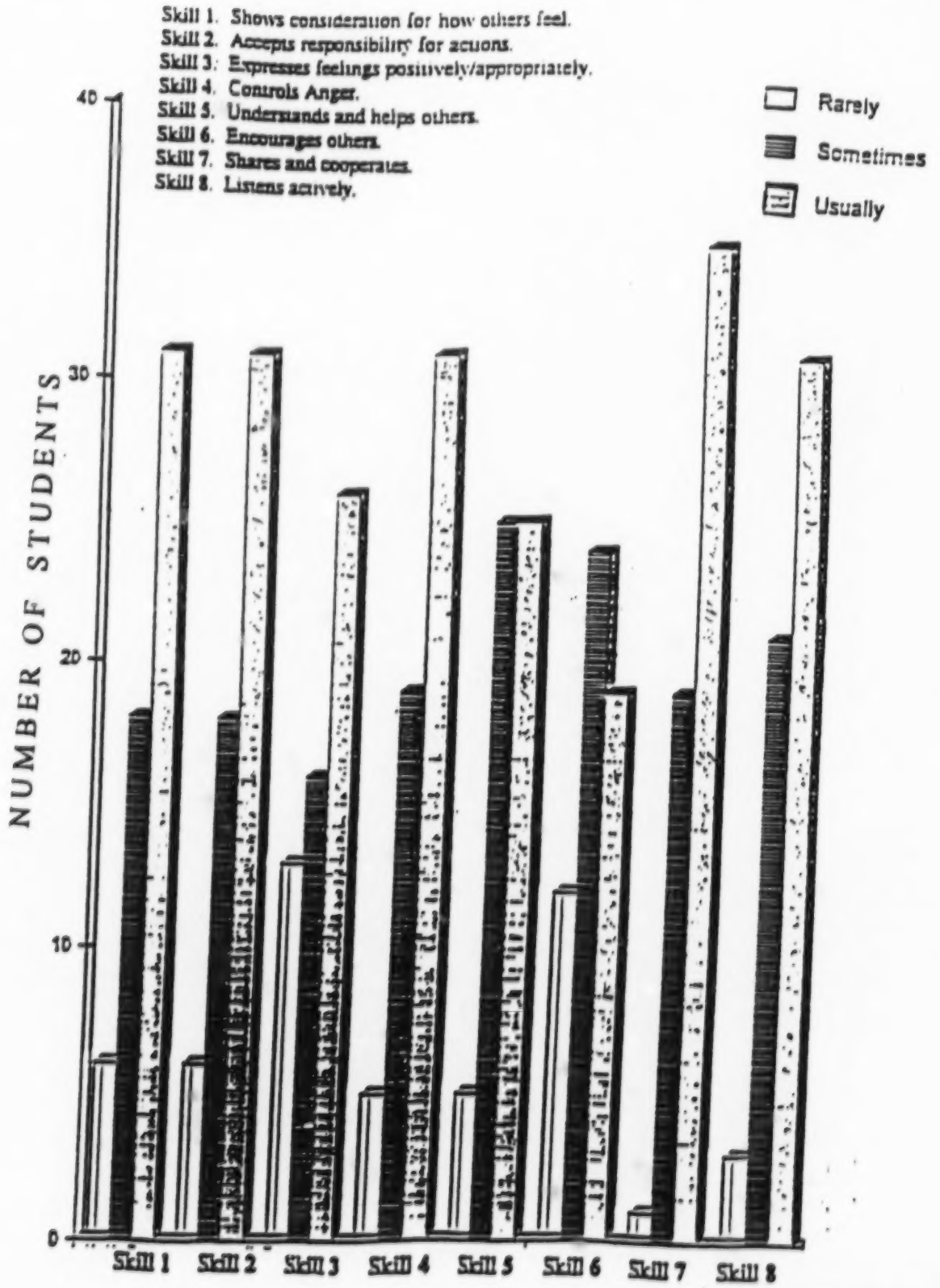
Appendix E

Post-Assessment of Social Skills 1-8, February 1997



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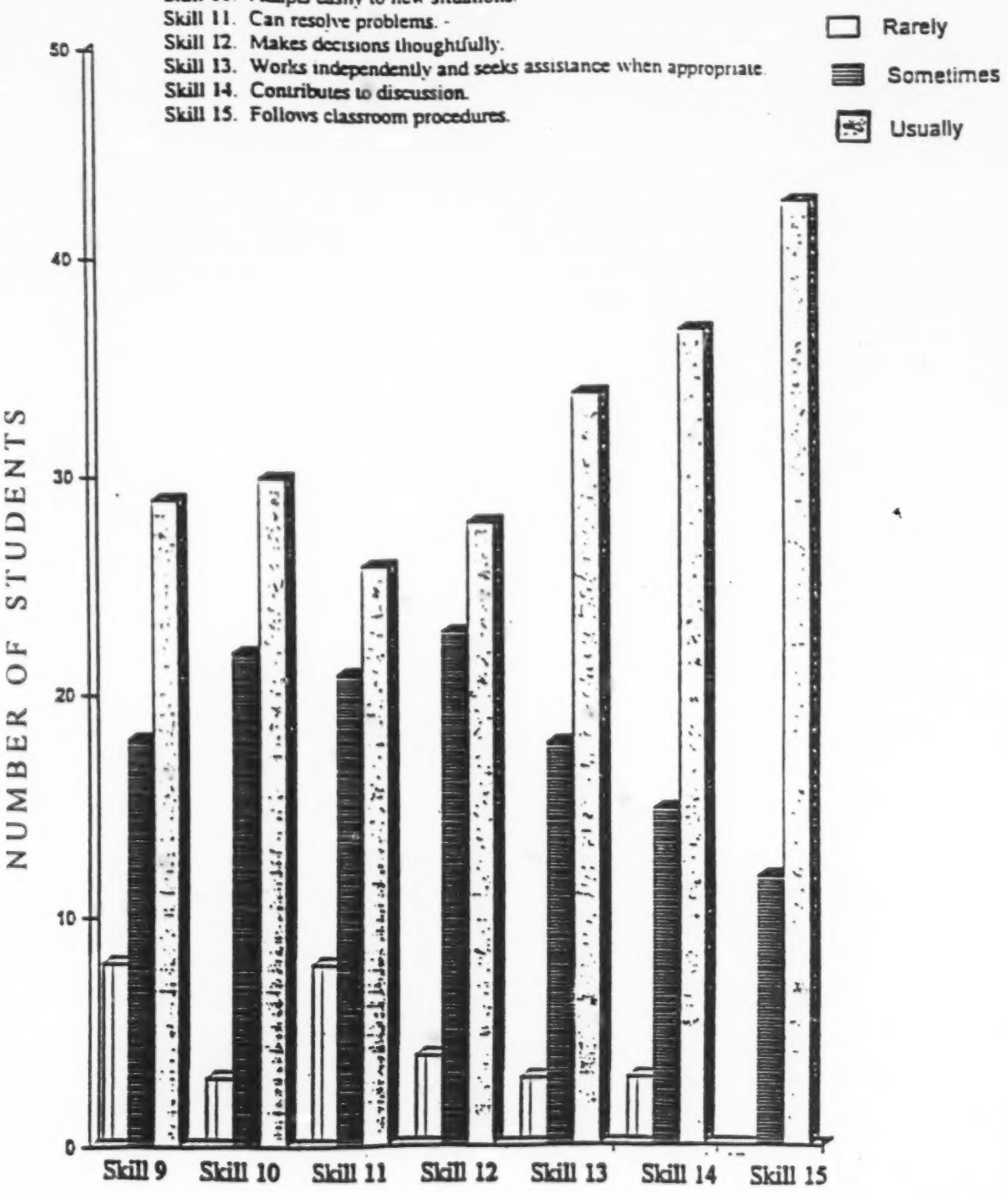
Appendix F
Post-Assessment of Social Skills 9-15, February 1997



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